



The Education Trust–Midwest

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Ed Trust-Midwest to Legislature: *Incorporate Best Practices from Leading States to Build Statewide Educator Evaluation System*

Today Sarah Lenhoff, director of policy and research, and Jason Mancini, director of government affairs, of The Education Trust-Midwest, testified to the Michigan House Education Committee on the importance of educator evaluation and support. Their testimony follows.

Thank you for giving us the chance to speak to you today about Michigan's statewide system of educator support and evaluation. I am Jason Mancini, director of government affairs at The Education Trust-Midwest (ETM). With me today is Sarah Lenhoff, our director of policy and research. ETM is a nonpartisan, data-driven, education research, information and advocacy organization. We work to serve as a source of nonpartisan information and expertise – and a partner to state leaders, educators and others – about Michigan education and achievement gap closing.

First, we'd like to thank lawmakers for your leadership on the development of this new system focused on raising teaching and learning in our schools. From the very beginning of this system's development in the 2011 tenure reforms, the legislature has been a leader on the issue of raising teaching quality.

Clearly, Michigan desperately needs this new system. Today, Michigan is at or near the bottom for student learning and improvement among all 50 states in most subjects and grades. In key subjects, like fourth-grade reading, our students are actually learning at lower levels today than they were ten years ago. But it doesn't have to be this way. The state of Tennessee provides us a good model of how an educator evaluation and support system can help dramatically and quickly transform our schools – and Michigan students' learning levels.

Tennessee has been far outpacing Michigan – and the national average – in student improvement since 2011. Indeed, it is now the nation's leading state for student improvement, according to the national assessment. These gains are being made not just for white students but for African-American students, too.

Tennessee's leaders attribute this extraordinary improvement to their implementation and investment in their statewide educator support and evaluation system, along with higher standards. In fact, none of the leading education states have improved student achievement without holding teachers accountable and supporting their improvement. Incorporating best practices from states like Tennessee into a statewide evaluation and support system will help put Michigan on a path to becoming a top ten education state.

Today we'd like to highlight a few ways SB 103 could be improved to better support the development of effective teachers, following the lead of states like Tennessee:

- **Ensure student learning growth is central to teacher effectiveness:** Teachers' central role is to improve student learning. That's why leading states have ensured that student learning growth is given appropriate weight in how teachers are evaluated and what kind of feedback they are given. ETM's 2012 study of local Michigan evaluation systems found that most of them do not use sound measures of student growth, and many of them underestimate the impact of their teachers on student learning. Recent amendments to SB 103 have watered down the focus on student learning as an integral component in measuring educator effectiveness.

We urge this committee to include a requirement that the state develop a student growth model based on state assessment data that districts are required to use for teachers in tested subjects. We also recommend that at least half of the student growth measure in teachers' evaluations be based on student growth on the state assessments.

- **State standards for evaluating teachers:** Michigan currently has a patchwork of local evaluation tools, not all of which are based on research and best practices. This means some teachers are getting fair evaluations that help them improve, while many others are not. SB 103 would make progress in addressing this problem by encouraging districts to adopt research-based evaluation tools, but the current legislation does not go far enough in ensuring that the tools districts use are based on best practices and research.

We urge this committee to require, rather than encourage, that evaluation tools meet certain minimum standards of quality, based on research and best practices.

- **Invest in state student growth model and evaluator training:** Tennessee leaders say their investment in a state student growth model and evaluator training have been integral to the success of their evaluation system. The Michigan Legislature has included \$14.8 million in this year's budget to implement a statewide system of educator evaluation and support. This investment could go a long way in Michigan to building a similar state student growth model and training evaluators on how to use research-based evaluation tools.

We encourage this committee to remove the language in SB 103 that would repeal the state's investment in this system. This investment should go toward a state growth model, evaluator training, oversight of the new system, and the development of an optional scoring framework that local districts could use to produce more reliable and credible annual performance ratings. These recommendations are based on best practices from other states.

- **Meaningful definition of master teachers:** About 97 percent of Michigan's teachers were rated "effective" or "highly effective" in the 2013-2014 school year. Meanwhile, MDE regulations

define master teachers based largely on credentials and getting “effective” ratings. Research shows credentials can be weak predictors of teaching quality. These practices risk marginalizing our truly masterful teachers. By ensuring that evaluations are more fair and accurate, SB 103 will help Michigan identify our most effective teachers, who can be developed into master and mentor teachers to support their peers.

We recommend the committee include a meaningful definition of master teachers, basing this honor on earning “highly effective” ratings over several years.

As Tennessee and plenty of leading states demonstrate, educational improvement can start with good policy, but it needs investment and sustained implementation to make it soar in classrooms.

Thank you for your time today.

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